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AUTHOR Clarke, James P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an ethnological analysis of the Bulgarian people. Part of an ethnic heritage teaching unit on Bulgarian culture, the unit is intended for use by social studies classroom teachers in elementary, junior high, and secondary schools. The paper is arranged in four major sections. Section I introduces the Bulgarians, focusing on their ethnic heritage, geographic distribution, immigration patterns, social structure, and life style. In section II, information is presented on Bulgaria's history and culture. Topics discussed include founding of the Bulgarian state in 681, domination by the Ottoman Turks, current political status, literary and religious activities among Slavs, and the role of the Bulgarian church in the movement for national independence. Section III focuses on Bulgarian saints, kings, and heroes. Among those discussed are St. Cyril and Methodius (inventors of the Cyrillic alphabet), Father Paisii of Hilendar (compiler of the first history of the Bulgarians in 1762), Asparuh (founder of the Bulgarian state in 681), and Prince Krali Marko (a Bulgarian Robin Hood). The final section focuses on Bulgarian immigrants to the United States since 1900. Most earlier immigrants were largely semiliterate villagers who came in search of economic opportunity, whereas later immigrants consisted mostly of political refugees who were generally well-educated and professional people. (DB)

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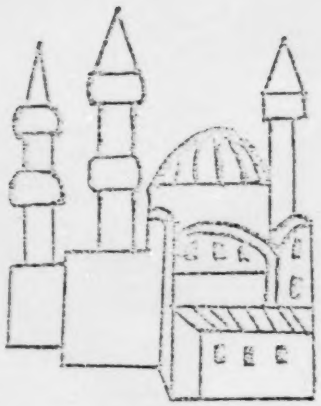

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BULGARIANS

WHO THEY ARE

by
James F. Clarke

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BULGARIANS: WHO THEY ARE

Like most other people, the Bulgarians are made up of several different peoples. Today, they are part of the great and numerous Slavic race extending from the Baltic Sea to the Aegean Sea and from the Adriatic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. The Slavs are divided into different branches and different countries. The Bulgarians belong to the South Slav branch, who live mostly in the Balkan Peninsula and include also the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, all in Yugoslavia. The Czechs, Slovaks and Poles belong to the West Slav branch. The largest branch, with which the Bulgarians have much in common, are the East Slavs, including the largest Slav people -- the Russians -- and the Bielorussians and the Ukrainians. Ancther ethnic element are the Bulgars who came from Asia and Russia and formed a state with the Slavs in the Balkans. Long ago, they disappeared among the Slavs. All that remains today is the name -- Bulgaria and Bulgarians. A third racial element, we suppose, were the Thracians, a very ancient people who lived in what is now Bulgaria long before the Greeks, the Romans and the Slavs. All we know about them is that once they were there and that they made beautiful artistic things. A few years ago, Bulgaria sent over to the United States a wonderful collection of ancient Thracian art treasures which toured the country with great success.

Bulgarians in this country came from Bulgaria and from areas surrounding Bulgaria which got left out when Bulgaria became an independent state. Bulgaria is inhabited mostly by Bulgarians, though there are some leftover Turks.

Bulgaria today is about the size of Ohio or 42,730 square miles and has a population of about nine million. It has the shape of a rectangle and lies in the central and eastern part of the Balkans. North of the Danube frontier is Romania, the east side is the Black Sea coast, along the southern border is a corner of Turkey and Greek Thrace, and the west borders on Yugoslavia, the other Balkan South Slav country. From the dawn of history the main road from Central Europe to the Near East ran diagonally through Bulgaria. It is a beautiful, fertile country with lots of high mountains and a long coast on the Black Sea with miles and miles of sandy beaches dotted with resort complexes. The Balkan Mountains from which the Peninsula gets its name, divides the country from West to East. It has a varied climate and a variety of fine agricultural products including excellent fruits and wines and the finest Oriental tobacco. It is most famous for its beautiful Rose Valley producing rose oil which is an important ingredient of many perfumes. It has many quaint old "museum" towns and modern cities. It is sprinkled with hot mineral springs. Bulgarians are famous all over Europe as skilled gardeners. The fermenting ingredient in Yogurt is scientifically known as the "Bulgarian bacillus" and this is credited with the unusal number of Bulgarians who reach a ripe old age.

In recent years, Bulgaria has changed from an agricultural country to a modern industrialized society. Bulgarians love the outdoors and Bulgaria is a land of summer and winter sports. Every Sunday, every able-bodied man, woman and child in the capital city Sofia takes to the hills -- the nearby 7,000 foot Mount Vitosha. Bulgarians also excel in international athletic competitions.

As a people Bulgarians are sentimental, they like to recite poetry, sing and to argue. They pride themselves on their hospitality. Everyone wants to own a piece of land and a house. After the Turks left, there were no large

feudal estates. They are hardworking and thrifty and are individualists, wanting to own their own small businesses, as did the Bulgarians who came to this country. At one time in Pittsburgh there were 40 Bulgarian bakeries. Bulgarians also are firm supporters of education.

Formerly a largely peasant country, Bulgaria is rich in folk customs and costumes, folksongs and folktales, one of the richest in Europe.

History and Culture

Bulgarians are celebrating the 1300th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state in 681, the first state among all the Slavic peoples. Yet modern, independent Bulgaria was observing only its centennial when Americans were celebrating the bi-centennial. Like most states Bulgaria has had its ups and downs. The first Bulgarian empire became very powerful and extended over most of the Balkans, but then it fell under Byzantine rule. After a century and a half, the second Bulgarian empire arose and became almost as large and strong as the first. But being first in the path of the conquering Ottoman Turks, Bulgaria was the first to fall under their domination. Five centuries followed of what the Bulgarians call the "Turkish Slavery." Finally came liberation at the hands of a Russian army and with the help of several Americans. And so the third Bulgarian kingdom arose and lasted until after the second World War. Since then Bulgaria has been a Socialist Republic like the rest of the countries of Eastern Europe.

Since it was re-established as an independent state, Bulgaria has been in five wars trying to regain the lands inhabited by Bulgarians that were left out when it became independent. Many Bulgarians from these lands left their homes to go to Bulgaria, others came to the United States.

All nations are proud of their history and of their contribution to culture and civilization. Bulgarians have special reasons to feel pride in their cultural contributions. In first place is the achievement of St. Cyril and his brother Methodius in inventing the first alphabet in the middle of the 9th century, for the use of the Bulgarians and all other Slavs for several centuries. The original alphabet went through some changes and came to be called "Cyrillic." It is still used by those Slavs who became or remained Eastern Orthodox in their religion: Bulgarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Bielorussians, Serbs and those Macedonians now in Yugoslavia. Other Slavs became Roman Catholic and adopted the Latin alphabet.

St. Cyril and his helpers invented their alphabet so as to be able to translate the Bible and church service books from Greek to Slavic, in order to carry on Christian missionary work among the Slavs. The literary language which resulted was used by all the Slavs for several centuries. This language is now known as Old Church Slavic or Old Bulgarian. In this way Bulgaria became the center of literary and religious activity among the Slavs. Its greatest achievement was to take this Slavic Bulgarian literature and culture and Orthodox Christianity to Russia. Bulgarians were among the first Slavs to be converted to Christianity. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was important in spreading Slavic culture among the Slavs. It also had a very important role in the history of the Roman Catholic Church in its relation to the Eastern Orthodox churches. Much later, in the nineteenth century, the Bulgarian Church again played an important role in pointing the way to national independence. For these reasons Bulgarians are devoted to their church as a national institution. The country is dotted with old monasteries, the largest and most important being Rila Monastery.

Bulgarian Saints, Kings and Heroes

There can be no question about Cyril and Methodius, creators of the original Bulgarian alphabet and literary language, being the first and greatest of Bulgarian saints. Their anniversary, May 24, has been celebrated a long time as one of the big Bulgarian holidays. Only second in importance is Saint Clement, their disciple, who as teacher laid the foundations of the Bulgarian Church and of Bulgarian Christian education. He is said to have had 3,000 pupils during his lifetime, centered around Ohrid, now in Yugoslav Macedonia.

Next in line is St. John, founder of the 10th century of Rila Monastery, the oldest and largest in Bulgaria, for centuries a mecca for pilgrims and now for tourists. It is in a scenic valley high up in the Rila mountains. Many tales are told about St. John's miraculous powers.

Although not officially sainted, great veneration is bestowed on the Macedonian monk, Father Paisii of Hilendar, a monastery on Mt. Athos in Greece. It was he who wrote in 1762 the first history of the Bulgarians. It is called "A Slavo-Bulgarian History of the Bulgarian People, their Kings and Saints, and of all Bulgarian Deeds and Events, here Compiled and Arranged by the Monk Paisii who lived on Mt. Athos, arriving in the year 1745 from the Eparchy of Samokov, and who compiled this history in 1762 for the benefit of the Bulgarian Nation." Paisii was born in Macedonia. For a century his history curculated in hand-written copies and had a tremendous effect in launching the Bulgarian National Revival. The first to make a copy was Bishop Sofronii of the little town of Vratsa. "Sinful Sofroni," as he called himself, was the author of the first modern Bulgarian book, a collection of sermons, printed in 1806. He was also a patriotic political leader.

Bulgaria's popular kings and princes naturally are connected with the first and second Bulgarian kingdoms. The first, of course, is Asparuh, founder

of the Bulgarian state in 681 and of a large empire. He represents the conquering Bulgars from the East. Next is Khan Krum who in 811 destroyed a large Byzantine army and captured the Byzantine emperor, Nicephorus. According to the legends, Krum had a drinking goblet made out of the emperor's skull.

For obvious reasons Prince Boris deserves a high place in the Bulgarian Hall of Fame: in 865 he brought his country into the family of Christian states. Eventually Bulgaria's church, headed by a Patriarch, became independent. Boris also welcomed the disciples of St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who then launched Bulgaria on its cultural and religious mission among the Slavs.

We now come to King Simeon, a son of Boris, perhaps Bulgaria's greatest ruler. He made his country the most powerful in Eastern Europe. He continued and extended the cultural work of his father, especially in literature, so that his is called the Golden Age. But this could not last. Although a successor, Samuel, extended the Bulgarian empire in the western end of the Balkans he was not able to hold out against one of Byzantium's greatest emperors, Basil II. After a battle in 1014, Basil blinded his 14,000 Bulgarian prisoners except for one out of a hundred who was left one eye so that he could lead his fellows back to Samuel. According to the story, when Samuel saw them he died of a heart attack. So barely a hundred years after its greatness, Bulgaria became a conquered country. But 175 years later, Bulgarians threw off the Byzantine Yoke to create the Second Bulgarian Kingdom which, under the leadership of Ivan Asen II, almost reached the extent and influence of the first. Another emperor from Constantinople was captured. But not for long. Disunity and decline set in the face of the conquering Ottoman Turks, who followed on the heels of the Tatars. Bulgaria was the first to go under. Its capital, Tirnovo, fell to the Turks in 1383. But not before Bulgaria went through another age of literary and artistic glory, echoes of which were felt in Renaissance Italy, under King Ivan Alexander.

Its brilliant writers, scholars, clerics, headed by Patriarch Euthumius, were scattered to the still free European and Russian world. So began the five centuries of "Turkish Slavery," not to end until 1878 and the beginning of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom. Legends arose in many parts of the country about Ivan Shisman, son and successor of Ivan Alexander -- that some day he would return.

Naturally, Bulgarians did not remain meekly for five "dark" centuries under their Turkish exploiters. The yearning for freedom persisted. Uprisings and revolts started almost at once after the Turkish conquest and broke out at intervals during the following five centuries. A wave of revolts, cruelly put down by the Turks, broke out at the end of the 16th century and again 100 years later. Bulgarians cooperated in the Austrian and Russian wars against the Ottoman Empire. But the brunt of the resistance movement was borne by the Haidut bands -- legendary and romanticized heroes celebrated in folk songs very much like England's Robin Hood, who robbed the rich Turks to help the poor Bulgarians, according to the legends and folksongs. Today we would call them guerrillas or partisans.

First and foremost of these legendary Bulgarian Robin Hoods was Krali Marko -- Prince Marko. An extensive cycle of folk-songs and tales celebrate the the extraordinary feats of strength of Marko and his miraculous horse, carried out mostly in Western Bulgaria, or Macedonia. A giant, it was said of him that he sat on the Balkan Mountains and washed his feet in the Danube River. His miraculous strength was said to come from having been nursed by a fairy. The magic Marko legends appealed to Serbs as well as Bulgarians. The haiduts were half highwaymen, half freedom fighters, but in any case outlaws operating in the mountains. Among famous leaders and one of the earliest was Chavdar Voyvoda (chief), hero of many folksongs. He is said to have had 300 followers operating in Western Bulgaria against the Turks. Much later came Indje Voyvoda who joined a band of Turkish outlaws at the end of the eighteenth century. But as time went

on he became more known as robbing the rich and protector of poor defenseless Bulgarians. A colorful personality, he operated in Eastern Bulgaria. His wife rode beside him. One of the most romantic of these haidut brigands was Rumena Voyvoda, leader of a band of 16 youths, who operated in the middle of the 19th century. She dressed and looked like a man but she was a liberated woman who fled to the mountains from the Turks, abandoning mother, husband and child. Like William Tell, she could shoot an apple on a man's head. The Turks never managed to catch up with her. A street in Sofia is named Rumena Voyvoda.

Eventually the unsuccessful revolts and haidut activity merged in the national revival and liberation movement of the 19th century which came to a head with the 1876 uprising and massacres, which shocked the world and made Bulgaria the center of European attention. Many are the revolutionary heroes Bulgarians venerate. Restless George Rakovski spent his short life in and out of Turkish prisons and in and out of Bulgaria. Author of Bulgarian history books, poet, editor of magazines and newspapers, he organized a large Bulgarian volunteer "legion" in Servia which fought against the Turks. Hadji Dimiter and Stephan Karadja are two popular heroes. They led some of Rakovski's legionnaires across the Danube River into the Balkan Mountains. They and all their men were killed by the Turks. A great national hero is Vasil Levski, called the "Apostle" because of his recruiting and organizing activity for the coming revolution. But he was betrayed and captured and hung by the Turks. Comes the revolution. The signal to start was given by George Benkovski, the Bulgarian Paul Revere, at the head of his "Flying Detachment" of horsemen. He too was captured and killed. The high point was reached by Hristo Botev: in a spectacular exploit he and his gang (cheta) commandeered a Danube steamer, crossed from Romania to Bulgaria, holed up in the Balkan Mountains until Botev and his cohorts were all killed by the Turks. Botev, cut down in his prime, was a poet, Bulgaria's greatest

even though he produced only a few poems. Among the heroes of the '76 revolution must be included an American, Januarius Aloysius MacGahan, a farm boy from New Lexington, Ohio, who became a newspaper foreign correspondent. As such, he reported the horrors of the bloody Turkish massacres in suppressing the revolt. Thanks to MacGahan that revolution became a success when the Russians declared war on the Turks and defeated them, in this way liberating the Bulgarians to become an independent state again. MacGahan's tombstone in New Lexington has on it: "MacGahan, Liberator of Bulgaria."

Many Russians, including Generals Gurko and Skovelev, became heroes of the war of liberation. Because not all the Bulgarians were included in free Bulgaria under the peace treaty, the struggle for independence continued, especially in Macedonia. Many more heroes for freedom arose. One in particular, Gotse Delchev, must be mentioned. He was the leader in another heroic revolution against the Turks which broke out in Macedonia twenty-five years after the rest of Bulgaria became free. Again the Turks succeeded in brutally putting it down. And Gotse Delchev himself was the chief victim. Macedonia remained under the Turks until it was divided ten years later among Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, Bulgaria getting smallest part. Today it is still divided.

One should not leave Bulgaria's heroes without including the favorite folk hero, Hitter Peter -- Sly Peter -- about whose clever escapades and tricks endless stories are told.

Bulgarians in America

Bulgarians who came to the United States brought with them a long and memorable history and tradition. Some, especially those from Macedonia, also brought their old political problems. They came because they had heard about freedom and the "the promised land." They had learned about America from

American missionaries, active in Bulgaria since the 1860's, from the few Bulgarians already here and from steamship company agents recruiting passengers. They found the trip across the ocean in steerage worse than saying goodby to the homeland.

It has been a tradition in the Balkans for men to go off to "make their fortunes" for longer or shorter periods, then come back home, marry and settle down. Many Bulgarians who came to America did go back, but some sent for their families and relatives or sent for a "mail-order-bride." For a long time Bulgarian immigrants to this country were a largely "bachelor" society. Being newcomers without knowledge of the English language, they could only look for jobs at hard labor. Self-imposed poverty was their lot, as they worked for low wages in steel and other mills and at building railroads. They lived frugally in boarding-house dormitories run by other Bulgarians, sometimes doubling up between day and night shifts and saving as much money as they could to take back home. As late as 1908 in a total of 50,000 Bulgarians in this country, there were only 50 families. At one time in West Homestead, Pennsylvania, there were 300 Bulgarians living in 20 boarding houses, but only three women. This helps to explain why, between 1910 and 1929 more Bulgarians went home than came here. Some went back to help fight Bulgaria's wars.

Immigrants from Bulgaria came largely because of the economic squeeze on peasants for land; those from surrounding Bulgarian lands such as Dobrudja, Thrace, and especially Macedonia, also came to escape political oppression.

The first Bulgarian visitors to the United States came soon after the Civil War, partly as a result of the American Protestant missionary presence in Bulgaria. The first immigrants started coming at the end of the last century. There were three main "waves" of immigration: the first was between 1900 and World War I, especially after the failure of the revolution in Macedonia, and at the time of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), when Macedonia was divided up. The

Bulgarians from Macedonia came mainly from the parts acquired by Greece and Serbia. Several hundred thousand Macedonians emigrated to Bulgaria from Greece and Serbia (later Yugoslavia), thus adding considerably to the Macedonian population already living in Bulgaria. The second "wave" of immigration was between World War I and World War II, many of whom went back. The third "wave" was since World War II, and consisted mostly of political refugees. Whereas the earlier immigrants were largely semi-literate villagers, after World War I and especially after World War II, they were mostly educated and professional people, some of whom already knew English. In time, they started individual or cooperative businesses, especially having to do with food -- bakeries, restaurants, etc. Their children acquired education and eventually some entered the professions and made distinguished contributions in many fields.

Bulgarians and Bulgarian Macedonians are the smallest Slav group in this country. The exact figures are not available because of the U. S. Immigration practice of identifying nationality by the country of birth, rather than nationality. One must be satisfied with a generous estimate of about 100,000. Similarly one can estimate that roughly 100,000 Bulgarians came to this country but many of them did not remain.

Unlike most other ethnic groups, the Bulgarians did not establish concentrated permanent settlements, but tended to scatter across the country as they looked for the kind of jobs they were obliged to seek. Today, Bulgarians are to be found in practically every state of the union, including Alaska. At first the main center was Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio, but like other Americans many went west, to the middle western cities. Now there are many in California also. Once Pittsburgh was a kind of center, later Granite City, Illinois; now it would be hard to pinpoint any main center. They have lacked a truly national organization although after World War II a sort of organization

developed -- the American Bulgarian League -- but it has not lasted. The largest and strongest organization of Bulgarians in this country is the Macedonian Patriotic Organization, with its newspaper, the Macedonian Tribune, in Indianapolis, Indiana, and its many churches. Founded in 1922, the M. P. O. has branches all over, including Canada, but especially in Ohio. It is dedicated to preserving and fostering Bulgarian traditions, customs and consciousness among Macedonian Americans and to working for the freedom and unity of the old Macedonian homeland.

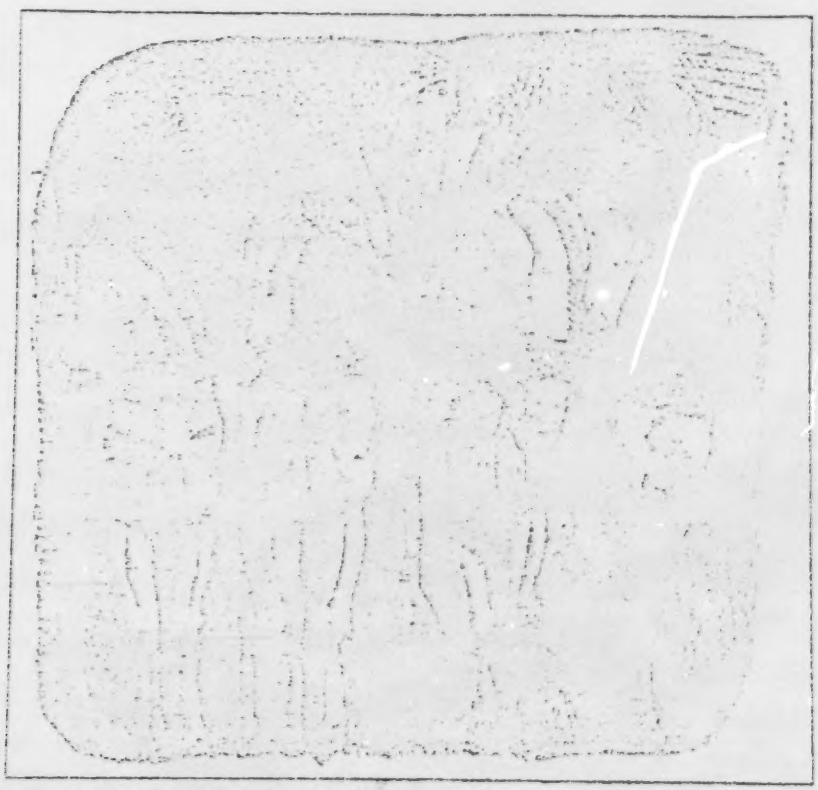
At times Bulgarians have suffered political discrimination because of political situations in the homeland. During World Wars I and II, American Bulgarians were victims of unfair attacks because Bulgaria, for historic reasons, was joined to Germany and because their neighbors, Serbia (Yugoslavia) and Greece were on the Allied side. But American Bulgarians were able to prove their loyalty to their adopted country.

Because of its historic, national role, the church became the center of Bulgarian social and community life in this country. Sometimes parochial schools were established. The first Bulgarian Orthodox Church was built in Granite City in 1909. Today there are about twenty. There were also publications -- daily and weekly newspapers -- which maintained contacts among the Bulgarian communities. Altogether about 200 were started, but because Bulgarians were few in number, there was a tendency for them to get lost in broader Slavic or American society.

Some Bulgarian folktales, poetry and novels have been translated into English. The best known is Under the Yoke, a historical novel about the liberation from the Turks by Bulgaria's greatest writer, Ivan Vazov.

Bulgarians in America from Bulgaria and from Macedonia cherish their beautiful costumes, customs, folk music and dances.

Folk music and dance troupes exist in a number of American cities; they design and make their costumes in accordance with tradition and perform at festivals or wherever their entertainment is appropriate. Young people learn the songs and dances and learn to play the instruments and in this way the Bulgarian folk arts and culture are handed on from generation to generation. Bulgarian dishes served at ethnic festivals are always popular with all Americans. Though small in relation to the size of other ethnic groups, the Bulgarian community in America carries a clout greater than its numbers might suggest. And although it is not likely that any great additional wave of immigration of Bulgarians will take place, the Bulgarian Americans already here are a permanent enrichment in our American society. This account of Bulgarians in the old country and the new could not end without mentioning the fact that one of Christopher Columbus's crew members, Dragan, was a Bulgarian from Ohrid in Macedonia.



The silver facing of a quiver from Golyama Moglia near the village of Douvanli. Plovdiv district (mid-fifth c. B.C)

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BULGARIA

България